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Harold E. Varmus, M.D.
American Cancer Society
Professor of Molecular Virology
Dept. of Microbiology & Immunology
University of California, San Francisco
San Francisco, CA 94143

Dear Dr. Varmus:

Thank you for soliciting my opinion on the best name for the AIDS retrovirus. Despite the concern by some scientists and physicians that "AIDS" not be included in the name for the virus, I favor a simple, direct, informative name such as AIDS retrovirus and ARV. Communications with patients about this virus requires, as your letter indicates, appropriate reassurance that infection is not the same as disease. Names which obscure the relationship of this virus to AIDS do not promote clear communications. We have used the terms AIDS retrovirus and ARV in San Diego for the past year and believe it has not provoked unnecessary anxiety.

I find the acronyms "HTLVIII" and "LAV" confusing to the laymen and inappropriate on virological and clinical grounds. The full names associated with these acronyms are inconvenient and cumbersome in conversation or writing. Because "AIDS-related virus" understates the strong evidence that ARV is the proximate cause of AIDS, I prefer "AIDS retrovirus".

I urge your committee to consider naming the virus either human AIDS retrovirus (HARV) or more simply AIDS retrovirus (ARV) and believe the lay and scientific community will find both the name and acronym useful.

Sincerely,

J. Allen McCutchan, M.D.
Associate Professor of Medicine
Research Director, Owen Clinic

JAM:sm